

ART. XII.—*The Dukduk Association of New Britain.*

By R. H. RICKARD.

(Presented by REV. LORIMER FISON.)

[Read November 12, 1890.]

Dukduk is the name of a secret association on the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, and of the central figure in that association—a man dressed in leaves in imitation of a bird, which (*beo*, bird) it is frequently called. Probably the resemblance was stronger in the past than now, and the figure was in imitation of a cassowary, but the constant rivalry between the originators in the various villages has yearly produced many minor variations. The lower part of the dress is like a petticoat, made of long supple palm leaves, extending from the breast to, or a little below, the knees ; around the body the leaves are fastened to a hoop of cane, to which are attached suspenders which pass over the shoulders. The upper part of the dress is a long conoid, the base of which is another hoop sufficiently wide to pass over the shoulders, and covered with more of the above-mentioned leaves, forming a long over-lapping fringe to hide the part where the two hoops meet, and rest one upon the other, and under which the arms are doubled up and hidden, while they hold the whole steady ; and also frequently carry a spear projecting behind and before, while the hand is unseen. The part which hides the face is framed with cane, and covered with various things, as leaves, fibres, cloth, &c., worked together as only natives can work them. It is sufficiently open for the man to see his way, but not to admit of his face being seen by anyone a few yards distant. Above the head it forms a spire, often four or five feet long, on which the decorations are the best that native taste and

skill can produce. The whole dress is very bulky, being about three feet in diameter across the hips, and it is so heavy that the suspenders severely chafe the shoulders.

There are two species of this genus of birds—the one we have described with the long head-dress is the Dukduk proper, the other is a Tubuan. The latter differs in appearance from the former only in having a shorter, and consequently less beautiful, head-dress; but he is of inferior rank, and is the worker. The long spire of the former could not be worn inland, as it would constantly come in contact with the over-hanging limbs of trees, vines, &c. The work of the Tubuan is to fight, levy fines, lead in destroying property as a means of punishment, taboo fruit trees and plantations when hired to do so, and to make collections of food and “tabu” (native shell-money), either by stealing or begging.

I have spoken of the Tubuan as “he,” but the word means an old woman, and this Tubuan is held to be a female, and as a matter of course among natives is the worker. “She” is said to give birth to the Dukduks, and all Tubuans have female names, except in rare cases, as in one here, where “she” assumed the name of her deceased chief.

These birds and the association have their home, and conduct their business, on a piece of tabooed ground, called a tareu, a few acres in area, generally on the beach. It is taboo to all females and uninitiated males, who may not even pass it in canoes, except at a distance of a mile or two. Many Tubuans, owned by different parties, may have their home on the one tareu, but I cannot find that more than one Dukduk may. Here the dress is kept hung on a post, and appears exactly as when worn. There is always a large house on the tareu, which is the rendezvous for the members, where native politics, scandal, and gossip are discussed. Any member may don the dress, but only the young men do so as a rule; with this on, the young fellow trots, with long springing strides, up and down the beach, or takes an excursion into the bush, whooping all the way, and occasionally pronouncing his or “her” name. Some of the motions, especially those of the head, cannot do other than remind one of the cassowary. The women and uninitiated hide on his approach; if they do not, they are chased, pelted, or robbed by him. Through him or “her” alone does the society communicate with, or operate upon, the outside community. All the association’s acts are in the name of the

Tubuan or Dukduk. It often happens that a man, angry with his wife, wives, or female relations, dons the dress himself, and appears before them as the Tubuan to receive "tabu" to appease the angry person, or he may get someone else to do this for him.

The Dukduk is generally admitted to have originated at Cape Gazelle, and it has been suggested by natives that it was begun by thieves, who thus disguised themselves for plunder. Being found lucrative, it was adopted by others, and so spread from place to place, the privilege of being allowed to practise it being paid for. During our residence here, we have known a town to thus purchase it for several hundreds of fathoms of "tabu," the vendor initiating and instructing the purchaser; and in another case, where the purchaser did not conduct it properly, the neighbouring associations enforced a fine upon him. The irregularity in this case, was that of allowing women to cross a part of the tareu. A very old man tells me that it did not exist here when he was a boy, but others think he is mistaken, so the date of its origin is obscure. Its present object is certainly to acquire "tabu," while it affords general amusement, and provides liberal feasts for the members. The shell-money is got from initiatory fees, fines, and remuneration for tabooing fruit trees, &c., as a protection against thieving.

The association is worked thus:—It is started by a person or number of persons becoming members and purchasing the right from an existing one, which instructs the novices. These promoters receive all the profits, *i.e.*, the income minus the working expenses, as of feasts and workmen. Any male may become a member by paying the initiatory contribution, which is large or small, according to his means, or those of his relatives; it varies from ten to one hundred fathoms of "tabu." Candidates generally give as much as possible, in order to be well esteemed in society. There are generally a great many initiated at one time. They are introduced into the tareu by a member of the society, where a great many men are sitting around the clear space in the centre. On their entering, the Tubuan, to whom they are introduced before the Dukduk, smacks them with "her" hand or a stick, which is a signal for the spectators to rush upon them and assault them in the same way, so that they are often very severely treated, the juveniles excepted. Their friends then pay the contribution for initiation to the Tubuan, which varies from ten to twenty fathoms of shell-money; subsequently, they

are introduced to the Dukduk, when from ten to one hundred fathoms more are paid. Then they are set before a spread of the best food procurable, which has been prepared beforehand, and they are not allowed to leave the ground till it is finished, which is generally several days. During this time, they join with the others in all-night singing and dancing, and try on, and perhaps dance in, the Tubuan's dress. This contribution runs the young men into debt, and compels them to work with fish traps, or make plantations in order to obtain "tabu" to clear themselves. There are very few adult males who are not members of the Dukduk, while many boys as young as four or five years are members too, as their relatives fear their being fined for crossing some part of the tabooed ground, or for some precocious remark about the "bird," which would cost more than the initiation fees. This makes men of them, for the uninitiated are laughed at and spoken of as "women," and natives dread sarcasm more than spears.

These large societies in the past found plenty of employment, as they were really the Government in the various towns. Everything that was wrong in their eyes, gave them an opportunity to extort "tabu;" in this sense they were a terror to the doers of such evil as is condemned by native public opinion; but "might" with these natives is generally "right," so that the weak, especially the women, were the victims of their lust for gain. If a woman were known to have a little hoard, it was not difficult to devise an excuse for dispossessing her of it. Thus, I knew a woman who owned a small basket of shell-money; she was accused of the serious crime of laughing at a man in the presence of others which caused him shame; he, being a member of the Dukduk, mustered a party at night to go with the Tubuan to her home, and they took the whole of her wealth.

In petty cases, the Tubuan simply goes to the home and drives "her" spear into the ground, and squats beside it, perhaps to hide "her" legs, which might be recognised by some mark on them, till some shell-money is offered to "her," which, if not sufficient, "she" rejects by turning from it. If a member of the society is near, he goes to the Tubuan and ascertains "her" business. If only women are present, and cannot guess the reason for "her" visit, they send for a man, who is known to be a member, to come and ascertain, for a woman dare not attempt to speak to "her," or even to hint that communication by speech with "her" is possible. In

these cases the members speak to the Tubuan or Dukduk in a whisper. It is taboo for even members to speak aloud to them in public.

In more important cases, a large party, headed by the Tubuan, goes at night to the home of the delinquent, or to that of his more wealthy relative, for compensation. It is often a pretty sight to see perhaps a hundred men with torches wending their way up a hill, while all are whooping, and the Tubuan often interjecting "her" name. Their errand is generally known beforehand, and they are met with the "tabu." If it were refused, the man's house, if he himself escaped, would be torn to pieces or burned, in which case the Tubuan only would be said to have done it. Dreadful violence and license are allowed to the Dukduk or to its representative, the Tubuan. "She" may murder men or women with little or no excuse, and little or nothing is said about it, lest the secrecy of the institution be violated. Its decisions are the *vox populi*, and its strength is the "might" which among natives is undoubted "right." Hence the people fear it to such an extent, that they would rather suffer an unjust fine, than venture to incur its wrath. When the "tabu" is brought forth, it is scrambled for by the crowd; any which the Dukduk owners might get, they would claim in the name of the Tubuan; it is called "tabu na tabaran" (evil spirits' shell-money, *i.e.*, poor man's money).

The owners get fees for tabooing cocoanut trees or plantations, for obtaining fines on behalf of private parties, and for the Tubuan's presence on great occasions. The Dukduk's taboo is greatly valued, as people fear its wrath too much to run the risk of incurring it by stealing what it has prohibited. A great deal of the society's income is from fines for various reasons, *e.g.*, speaking disrespectfully of the "bird," as by implying the truth as to "her" person, by calling its dress "leaves" instead of "feathers," for speaking about it in the presence of women, &c. No one must hint that things are not what they are called, but of course the supposed secrecy is much greater than the real. Any excuse is availed of to fine non-members, *e.g.*, a lad here was fined three fathoms of shell-money for accidentally breaking a member's pipe, which might have been bought for a finger's length.

The Tubuan occasionally makes excursions in quest of fowls, fish, and puddings, for feasts on the tareu.

The N.W. monsoon is the fishing season, and in it most men and boys living near the beach are thus engaged, and in this way they accumulate more or less shell-money ; so when it is near, the Dukduk and Tubuans are said to die. A few days before their death there is generally a public dance, in which the Dukduk and Tubuans take part ; then there is a collection on their behalf, which is made by either spreading a cloth on the ground, or carrying it around among the people, and into it men and women throw their contributions of shell-money-pieces, varying from six inches to a yard in length. On the day of the death there is a feast on the tareu, when the dress is all burned, and there is pretended crying, which is all that outsiders know of the sad event. Collectors of curios have tried hard with tempting prices, to buy the head-dresses, but always in vain. Towards the close of the monsoon, when shell-money is more plentiful, these birds, phoenix-like, come to life again amid great ceremony and rejoicing among the members.

In all these things the proverbial proclivity of the native mind to prohibitions is very manifest. In the Dukduk it is taboo for men to have connection with their wives during its preparation, as also to eat food prepared by women, except that which requires but little handling, as whole taro or fowls ; it is taboo to tie or fix in certain ways when making the dress, and other things too numerous to mention are "taboo." In various districts there may be slight differences in these and in other parts of the Dukduk. We have noticed on the North coast it is conducted with much less severity than on this side.

We have spoken of the Dukduk as it was a few years ago, but at the present time it is almost dormant, owing possibly in some degree to the influence of civilisation, but chiefly to the opposition of the whites. This has taken several forms—

(1) That of ignoring their taboos, as by leading their servants or concubines with them, when walking the beach over the tareu. This greatly annoys the men, spoils their craft, makes them ashamed in the presence of their own women, and it demonstrates to the latter the falseness of the consequences which are said to result from it.

(2) That of violence in cases where the Dukduk is the cause of war which interrupts the markets, or where it interferes with their boats, in the crews of which are some non-members visiting or landing at places near the tareu.

A short time ago the owner of a Dukduk was fined by the German Court two hundred fathoms of shell-money, for disturbing the peace of his district. Since then, a Manilla man in the employ of whites was killed by the Dukduk people while he was making a road through a tareu; this led to fighting, and severe consequences for the natives. Thus it has been checked, and it remains to be seen whether it will die altogether, or be conducted with moderation, and so continue more as an amusement than as a means of extortion.

---